

3. The Wonder That was India – A. L.

Basham

Hindu civilization will, we believe, retain its continuity. The Bhagavad Gita will not cease to inspire men of action, and the Upanishads men of thought. The charm and graciousness of the Indian way of life will continue, however much affected it may be by the labour-saving devices of the West. People will still love the tales of the heroes of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and of the loves of Dusyanta and Sakuntala and Pururavas and Urvashi. The quiet and gentle happiness which has at all times pervaded Indian life where oppression, disease and poverty have not overclouded it will surely not vanish before the more hectic ways of the West.

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Much that was useless in ancient Indian culture has already perished. The extravagant and barbarous hecatombs of the Vedic age have long since been forgotten, though animal sacrifice continues in some sects. Widows have long ceased to be burnt on their husbands' pyres. Girls may not by law be married in childhood. In buses and trains all over India brahmans rub shoulders with the lower castes without consciousness of grave pollution, and the temples are open to all by law. Caste is vanishing; the process began long ago, but its pace is now so rapid that the more objectionable features of caste may have disappeared within a generation or so. The old family system is adapting itself to present-day conditions. In fact the whole face of India is altering, but the cultural tradition continues, and it will never be lost.

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The whole of South-East Asia received most of its culture from India. Early in the 5th century B.C. colonists from Western India settled in Ceylon, which was finally converted to Buddhism in the reign of Ashoka. By this time a few Indian merchants had probably found their way to Malaya, Sumatra, and other parts of South-East Asia. Gradually they established permanent settlements, often, no doubt, marrying native women. They were followed by brahmans and Buddhist monks, and Indian influence gradually leavened the indigenous culture, until by the 4th century a.d. Sanskrit was the official language of the region, and there arose great civilizations, capable of organizing large maritime empires, and of building such wonderful memorials as their greatness as the Buddhist stupa of Borobodur in Java, or the Saivite temples of Angkor in Cambodia. Other cultural influences, from China and the Islamic world, were felt in South-East Asia, but the primary impetus to civilization came from India.

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Indian historians, proud of their country's past, often refer to this region as "Greater India", and speak of Indian "colonies". In its usual modern sense the term "colony" is hardly accurate, however. Vijaya, the legendary Aryan conqueror of Ceylon, is said to have gained the island by the sword, but beyond this we have no real evidence of any permanent Indian conquest outside the bounds of India. The Indian "colonies" were peaceful ones, and the Indianized kings of the region were indigenous chieftains who had learnt what India had to teach them.

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Northwards Indian cultural influence spread through Central Asia to China. Faint and weak contact between China and India was probably made in Mauryan times, if not before, but only when, some 8,000 years ago, the Han Empire began to drive its frontiers towards the Caspian did India and China really meet. Unlike South-East Asia, China did not assimilate Indian ideas in every aspect of her culture, but the whole of the Far East is in India's debt for Buddhism, which helped to mould the distinctive civilizations of China, Korea, Japan and Tibet.

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As well as her special gifts to Asia, India has conferred many practical blessings on the world at large; notably rice, cotton, the sugarcane, many spices, the domestic fowl, the game of chess (p. 810), and, most important of all, the decimal system of numeral notation, the invention of an unknown Indian mathematician early in the Christian era (p. 497f). The extent of the spiritual influence of India on the ancient West is much disputed. The heterodox Jewish sect of the Essenes, which probably influenced early Christianity, followed monastic practices in some respects similar to those of Buddhism. Parallels may be traced between a few passages in the New Testament and the Pali scriptures. Similarities between the teachings of western philosophers and mystics from Pythagoras to Plotinus and those of the Upanisads have frequently been noticed.

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None of these similarities, however, is close enough to give certainty, especially as we have no evidence that any classical writer had a deep knowledge of Indian religion. We can only say that there was always some contact between the Hellenic world and India, mediated first by the Achaemenid Empire, then by that of the Seleucids, and finally, under the Romans, by the traders of the Indian ocean. Christianity began to spread at the time when this contact was closest. We know that Indian ascetics occasionally visited the West, and that there was a colony of Indian merchants at Alexandria. The possibility of Indian influence on Neo-platonism and early Christianity cannot be ruled out.

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Many authorities may doubt that Indian thought had any effect on that of the ancient West, but there can be no doubt of its direct and indirect influence on the thought of Europe and America in the last century and a half, though this has not received adequate recognition. This influence has not come by way of organized neo-Hindu missions. The last eighty years have seen the foundation of the Theosophical Society, of various Buddhist societies, and of societies in Europe and America looking for inspiration to the saintly 19th-century Bengali mystic, Paramahansa Ramakrishna, and to his equally saintly disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Lesser organizations and groups have been founded in the West by other Indian mystics and their disciples, some of them noble, earnest and spiritual, others of more dubious character.

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Here and there Westerners themselves, sometimes armed with a working knowledge of Sanskrit and first-hand Indian experience, have tried to convert the West to a streamlined Yoga or Vedanta. We would in no way disparage these teachers or their followers, many of whom are of great intellectual and spiritual calibre; but whatever we may think of the Western propagators of Indian mysticism, we cannot claim that they have had any great effect on our civilization. More subtle, but more powerful, has been the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, through the many friends of India in the West who were impressed by his burning sincerity and energy, and by the ultimate success of his policy of non-violence in achieving India's independence. Greater than any of these influences, however, has been the influence of ancient Indian religious literature through philosophy.

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The pioneers of the Asiatic Society of Bengal quickly gained a small but enthusiastic following in Europe, and Goethe and many other writers of the early 19th century read all they could of ancient Indian literature in translation. We know that Goethe borrowed a device of Indian dramaturgy for the prologue to "Faust" and who can say that the triumphant final chorus of the second part of that work was not in part inspired by the monism of Indian thought as he understood it? From Goethe onwards most of the great German philosophers knew something of Indian philosophy. Schopenhauer, whose influence on literature and psychology has been so considerable, indeed openly admitted his debt, and his outlook was virtually that of Buddhism. The monisms of Fichte and Hegel might never have taken the forms they did if it had not been for Anquetil-Duperron's translation of the Upanisads and the work of other pioneer Indologists.

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In the English-speaking world the strongest Indian influence was felt in America, where Emerson, Thoreau and other New England writers avidly studied much Indian religious literature in translation, and exerted immense influence on their contemporaries and successors, notably Walt Whitman. Through Carlyle and others the German philosophers in their turn made their mark on England, as did the Americans through many late 19th-century writers such as Richard Jeffries and Edward Carpenter.

Though in the contemporary philosophical schools of Europe and America the monistic and idealist philosophies of the last century carry little weight, their influence has been considerable, and all of them owe something at least to ancient India. The sages who meditated in the jungles of the Ganga Valley six hundred years or more before Christ are still forces in the world.

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It is today something of an anachronism to speak of Western civilization or Indian civilization. Until very recently cultures were sharply divided, but now, when India is but a thirty hours' journey from London, cultural divisions are beginning to disappear. If a modus vivendi is reached between liberal democracy and communism, and civilization survives, the world of the future will have a single culture with, it is to be hoped, many local differences and variations. India's contribution to the world's cultural stock has already been very large, and it will continue and grow as her prestige and influence increases. For this reason if for no other we must take account of her ancient heritage in its successes and its failures, for it is no longer the heritage of India alone, but of all mankind.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

1. What is the most significant quality of Indian civilization?

Answer- The most significant quality of Indian civilization is its continuity.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

2. Mention the most important characteristic of the Indian way of life.

Answer- The most important characteristics of the Indian way of life are full of quietude and gentle happiness.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

3. When did Indian cultural influence begin in Ceylon?

Answer- Indian cultural influence began in Ceylon in the early period of 5th century.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

4. Who were the first Indian go to the South-East-Asian countries?

Answer- A few merchants were the first Indian go to the South-East-Asian countries.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

5. What is referred to by Indian historians as 'Greater India'?

Answer – 'Greater India' refers to the South-East-Asian countries.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

6. Who is said to have conquered Ceylon first?

Answer – Vijaya, an Aryan hero, is said to have conquered Ceylon first.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

7. When did the real contact between India and China begin?

Answer – The real contact between India and China began during Maurayan Kings. But the real contact took place before 2000 years when the Hun Empire tried to expand its frontiers.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

8. What aspects of Indian culture influenced the Far-East most significantly?

Answer – Buddhism of Indian culture influenced the Far-East most significantly, which spread to China, Japan, Korea and Tibet.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

9. Mention some 'practical blessings' conferred on the world by India?

Answer – Some 'practical blessings' conferred to the world by India are rice, cotton, sugar cane, many kinds of spices, the game of chess, the decimal system and zero.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

10. What shows that some Jewish sects were also influenced by India?

Answer – The Jewish sects followed the Buddhist monastic practices, which was very much Indian.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

11. Which Indians influenced Europe and America most?

Answer – Paramhans Ramakrishna, his disciple Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi influenced America and Europe most.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

12. Which quality of Mahatma Gandhi influenced the West most?

Answer – Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence, sincerity, and energy influenced the West most.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

13. In what way was Goethe indebted to India?

Answer – Goethe was very much influenced by Indian Dramaturgy and he had confessed this debt in the Prologue of his play “Faust”.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

14. Which American writers were influenced most by Indian thoughts?

Answer – American writers Thomas Carlyle, Thoreau and Walt Whitman were influenced most by Indian thoughts.

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Que. 1 Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each, as far as possible in your own words: -

15. What kind of world culture we may expect to emerge in future?

Answer – In future, we hope that there will be one composite culture in the world, having no division.

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Que. III Choose the answer that you find correct according to the text: -

1. The main problems of India are
 - a. labour-saving devices.
 - b. action and thought.
 - c. disease and poverty.
 - d. hectic ways of the world.

Ans. **c. disease and poverty.**

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Que. III Choose the answer that you find correct according to the text: -

2. The old face of India
 - a. has already changed fully.
 - b. is vanishing daily.
 - c. is changing fast.
 - d. is not likely to change at all.

Ans. **c. changing fast.**

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Que. III Choose the answer that you find correct according to the text: -

3. The earliest influence of ancient India culture on South-East Asia can be traced back to-

- a. 4th Century A.D.
- b. 5th Century B.C.
- c. 1st Century A.D.
- d. 9th Century B.C.

Ans. **b. 5th Century B.C.**

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Que. III Choose the answer that you find correct according to the text: -

4. Vijaya, who is said to have conquered Ceylon first, was-
- a. a king from folk tales.
 - b. a king from fables.
 - c. a king from epics.
 - d. a king from real life.

Ans. **d. a king from real life.**

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Que. III Choose the answer that you find correct according to the text: -

5. In the beginning, cultural relations between China and India were-
- a. not very strong.
 - b. mutually all assimilative.
 - c. pervasive and predominant.
 - d. pervasive and weakening.

Ans. **a. not very strong.**

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Que. III Choose the answer that you find correct according to the text: -

6. The Western dissemination of Indian mysticism was-
- a. highly influential.
 - b. very demoralizing.
 - c. very rejuvenating.
 - d. not very influential.

Ans. **a. highly influential.**

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Match the words with their meanings: -

1. Hectic – a. leader of a clan or tribe
2. Hecatomb – b. group of people united by religious beliefs and opinions
3. Sect – c. Native
4. Leavened – d. connected with sea or navigation
5. Indigenous – e. without rest
6. Maritime – f. quality or influence spreading in and changing some thing
7. Impetus – g. driving force
8. Chieftain – h. great public sacrifice

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Use the following phrases in sentences of your own: -

1. Rub shoulders with – to associate

Sentence – Today's women rub shoulders with men.

2. In fact – actually

Sentence – In fact, my friend is a good human being.

3. Rule out – eliminate, prevent, deny

Sentence – Principal ruled out the demands of students.

4. Look for – search

Sentence – He is looking for a new job.

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Use the following phrases in sentences of your own: -

5. Here and there – in various places

Sentence – Don't wander here and there.

6. Carry little weight –

Sentence – His opinion always carries little weight.

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Find antonyms for the following words: -

1. Poverty x richness
2. Vanish x appear
3. Long x short
4. Rapid x slow
5. Assimilate x separate, Dissimilate
6. Dubious x certain
7. Disparage x praise, appreciate
8. Insincerity x sincerity
9. Adequate x Inadequate